

**The Group for Beardless Irises of the British Iris Society**  
**Newsletter No 45 – February, 2001**

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**Regional Representatives**

Eastern Area	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.
London Area	Mrs. Anne Blanco White - as above
Midlands Area	Mr Philip Allery – as above
North Eastern Area	Miss Clare Dodsworth, 42 Middleham Road, DARLINGTON, Co. Durham. DL1 3DJ.
North Western Area	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.
Southern Area	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.
South Eastern Area	Mrs. Olga Wells, 24 Westwood Road, MAIDSTONE, Kent ME15 6BG
South Western Area	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.
Scotland	Mrs. Brita Carson, "Thornbank", Douglas Terrace, LOCKERBIE, Dumfriesshire DG11 2DZ.
Wales	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.

(Note: For effective cover and reporting on beardless iris bloom and seasonal activities of members, representatives are required urgently for the eastern, north-western, southern and south-western areas of England, of which the boundaries are being reviewed; also for Wales. - Please volunteer. Ed.)

**Specialist Help**

Japanese Irises	Mrs Anne Blanco White – as above
Laevigatas	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.
Louisianas	Volunteer needed please
Pacificas	Rev.Fr.Philip Jones, Erdington Abbey, 49 Sutton Road, Erdington, BIRMINGHAM. B23 6QU
Sibiricas	Mrs Jennifer Hewitt, "Haygarth", Cleeton St Mary, CLEOBURY MORTIMER, Kidderminster, Worcs. DY14 0QU
Spurias	Volunteer needed please – see editorial.

**Overseas Contacts in U.S.A.**

Japanese-	Mrs. Andrew (Carol) Warner, Secretary, The Society for Japanese Irises, 16815 Falls Road, Upperco, MD 21155.
Pacificas-	Mr. Steve Taniguchi, Editor, <i>Almanac, Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris</i> , 3306 Forbes Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95051, U.S.A.
Sibiricas -	Mrs Judith M. Hollingworth, Editor, 'The Siberian Iris', 124 Sherwood Road East, Williamston, MI 48895, USA
Spurias -	Carole Speiss, Editor, <i>Spuria Iris Society's Newsletter</i> , 6204 N 15 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85015, USA

The Group for Beardless Irises is a section of the British Iris Society. Membership of the Society is not a pre-requisite for membership of this Group, but it is fully recommended. The Society's Year Book, published annually, is an additional source of material on the cultivation of beardless irises, and contains articles by eminent irisarians on a wealth of interesting subjects. Membership application forms are available from Mr. Clive Russell, B.I.S. Enrolment Secretary, whose address is – 47, Station Road, Barnet, Herts. EN5 1PR. Clive's E.mail address is [britirisoc@aol.com](mailto:britirisoc@aol.com) - Telephone and Fax: 0208-441-1300.

**GROUP AIMS AND OBJECTIVES - The Group's aims and objectives are to foster communication between members in Great Britain, Europe and overseas by the exchange of ideas, seeds and plants; to help newcomers with their interests and problems; and to report on new work in hybridisation.**

## **CONTENTS**

Page 2	–	Contents, Editorial deadlines, Library and Subscriptions
Page 3	–	Chairman's message – Raymond Bomford
Page 6	–	Secretary's report – Anne Blanco White
Page 7	–	Editorial – Philip Allery
Page 8	–	Finance – Philip Allery
Pages 9	–	Membership – New members;
and 10	–	Changes of address; resignations, etc.
Pages 11	–	Regional reports for London (Anne Blanco White); Midlands (Philip Allery);
and 12	–	North-east (Clare Dodsworth); and South-east (Olga Wells).
Page 14	–	Report from Scotland (Brita Carson)
Page 16	–	A visit to Ireland (Norma Harris)
Page 17	–	Ensata report – Anne Blanco White Louisiana report – Sue Pierce
Page 18	–	Pacific Coast Irises – S.P.C.N.I. – Where did they come from?
Page 19	–	Pacific Coast Irises – Revd. Fr. Philip Jones
Page 20	–	Siberians at Cleeton in 2000 – Jennifer Hewitt
Page 21	–	Spurias – Philip Allery
Page 21	–	Reports from Overseas
Page 23	–	Plants sales and seed list
Page 24	–	Stop Press! – Further details – B.I.S. Convention, 24 <sup>th</sup> to 27 <sup>th</sup> May, 2002

## **EDITORIAL DEADLINES**

Group editorial deadlines are 1<sup>st</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> November. Back issues are available at a cost, inclusive of postage, of £2.00 each (U.K. & Europe) or £2.50 for overseas members. Requests for back copies of newsletters, with payment, to Editor please. Articles for publication are needed urgently. Without your participation the Group will founder. You can send copy for publication in manuscript or typescript; on 3 1/2" floppy disk or CD in Word, Works or rtf; or e-mail me at [Philip.E.Allery@btinternet.com](mailto:Philip.E.Allery@btinternet.com) Do take part and enjoy!

## **LIBRARY**

Prints or slides of photographs of beardless irises would be welcomed, with permission to include them with articles in future newsletters. The Group has an extensive library of books and newsletters, with current catalogues from several American Iris Nurseries, which is available to members in the U.K. and Europe on payment of postage. An up-to-date list is being prepared. Copies will be available. S.a.e. with requests please.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

**Membership subscription rates for the year 2001 are £4.00 (U.K. & Europe) or £4.50 for other overseas members. Payments to Membership Secretary or to Treasurer please. If you have paid your 2001 subscription at the 2000 rate please send the balance with your next remittance. Adjustments by way of membership subscription credits will be made if newsletter publication falls below two issues in any twelve-month period. Members having made advance payments will be notified of the amount credited.**

**It is appreciated that the cost of remitting subscriptions is increasing and facilities for advance payments over a three-year term are available, subject to annual adjustment. If you wish to renew your membership we will find some convenient way for you to pay your subscriptions; just let us know. An equivalent value in beardless iris seeds would be acceptable.**

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE -

As I write this in mid December as you will know all too well the whole of the country is one large squelch. The ground is so waterlogged so as to remove ones footwear if we venture onto the garden. Instead I have been urged to give you a cursory account of the New Zealand Iris Conference. This was held in the first week of November at Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty region of the North Island.

Prior to that by way of killing two birds with one visit I had been in the South Island at Dunedin, the so-called "Edinburgh of the South". It was here that the New Zealand Rhododendron Society chose to hold their 2000 Conference, allied to numerous garden visits. These were followed by a post conference tour of gardens in among other places the hill country of Central Otago. Many of the Hill stations had old established gardens dating back 100 years or more and were full of unexpected plants tended by descendants of the original pioneer cattle and sheep raisers. I was to visit the same area later on the Post Iris Conference tour. I will contain myself by saying that the region holds some of the most intriguing landscapes and enterprising people that I have ever met with. If nothing else you should read about Otago with a flora and fauna unique in the world. But more of that later.

Peter Cox, the world-famed expert from Glendoich in Scotland, gave the main lecture at the Rhododendron Conference. In the local Dunedin paper he gave it as his considered opinion that most of the world's Rhododendron species would thrive in and around Dunedin. I would imagine much the same applies to Irises in the country as a whole. Every Iris species ever cultivated should succeed somewhere here. That seems a very bold statement I know. But consider this: if transposed onto the Northern hemisphere New Zealand would stretch from the south of France across Spain and into N. Africa. I did not go north of Auckland. Here the long peninsular would be poking into Africa's semi-tropical region. Logically New Zealand then should have a Mediterranean climate of warm and wet winters, and hotter and drier summers. I do not think it is as simple as that. I will have to check it up!

There are more hills and mountains than I expected and they of course affect the rainfall patterns. Many cropping areas including the famous grasslands are irrigated. In the North Island where a lot of soils derive from ancient volcanic action, the drainage and moisture retaining qualities must be first-rate. But above all the most striking thing to me as an ex farmer is the standard of husbandry. The stocking rates of the best Dairying and Lamb-raising areas show that. The best land supports 12 or more sheep per acre. The application and research into Animal Husbandry in New Zealand must lead the world.

The same must apply to crop husbandry. New Zealand is a major exporter of agricultural and horticultural produce or is at the very least self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Milk products and wool of course are the main products followed by lamb and beef. Being primary producers the New Zealand farmers are exposed to the whims of market forces. As a fellow farmer my heart goes out to them. We get used to being either stitched up or screwed down. They are always the first to suffer when there is a surplus, and of course the rest of the population eventually suffer a decline in their income also.

New Zealand is among other things a major exporter of apples although I do not remember seeing an extensive apple orchard on our journeys. What I did see all over both islands is an ever-expanding wine producing industry. Perhaps they have a true Mediterranean climate after all. Prizes are being wrested from other wine-growing countries in international shows. What is more New Zealanders are in demand to run other vineyards abroad. This must be the ultimate accolade. I only hope and pray that with worldwide expansion of "wineries" the market does not collapse. The capital cost of setting up the equipment not to mention the wait before full production must be very expensive. I shudder to think of the gamble involved. When you pass your local off-licence go in and enquire about, and if possible buy, the Otago Pinot Noir from Lake Wanaka region.

Another crop much in evidence, which takes some twenty-five years to mature, is the growing of *Pinus radiata* for timber production. Tender in most of Britain this pine comes from the Mediterranean climate of coastal California. It is claimed that they get superior growth rates than in its home land. In fact New Zealanders will probably try any crop. The production of kiwi fruit and venison are other examples of their resourcefulness.



That brings me back to irises. As you probably know all too well the benign climate has meant that many introductions have become major weeds and pests proliferating way beyond expectations. The rabbit being the prime example; driving out by starvation almost to the point of extinction of many native birds and animals; not to mention laying waste to the sheep and cattle pastures. Plant-wise we saw great tracts of European gorse, broom and wild rose; almost if not totally beyond the wit of man to control. As a result the New Zealand Agricultural Authorities prohibit an increasing list of plant imports. This includes many irises. I would not be too surprised if rhododendrons appear on the list also. I understand the concern about introducing plant and animal diseases but this seems to me to be bureaucracy gone haywire. It is very frustrating to the New Zealand Iris Society. Needless to say if any new plant did get out of hand it would be soon stamped out and not given fifty years of head start as with previous plant introductions.

But perhaps all is not lost with irises. Whilst I was in Dunedin I read that somewhere in Otago enterprising Dutch bulb growers have been encouraged or at least allowed to set up an embryonic tulip growing industry. They will probably do much better in the partially rain-shadowed areas than in the fens of the Netherlands. If tulips will they then expand into fritillarias and then ultimately into juno and onco-cyclus irises. It is an exciting thought! Like the grape, the apricot and the apple which do well in Otago they all originate in the steppes and dry areas of Central Asia. I also heard that the apple-breeding industry is introducing native wild strain of apple in the hope of producing apples resistant to fungal diseases. It seems there is one law for economic benefit and another law for the ordinary plant enthusiast. Let's hope something will develop along these lines. The climate of New Zealand seems well placed to suit many endangered species from around the world. The gain to the Tourist Industry would be immense. Those are just my private thoughts. I should imagine that the great centre for iris and lily propagation in Oregon for instance could be duplicated in New Zealand.

It is a pity that the Iris Conference Report did not include a rainfall map and a review of the various micro-climates in New Zealand. What was very evident across the whole of the Islands is the great number of windbreaks – conifers of all sorts, Lombardy poplars and even phormium tenax. I can just imagine flocks of sheep with huddled heads inside this native flax plant being very cosy and protected. In other words at times New Zealand must experience truly horrendous gales.

I will give brief details of the lectures relating to the Beardless Group at the end, which I hope you will find of interest. Courtesy demands that we obtain permission from the authors and the Society before we reproduce them. However I will be only too pleased to lend my copy of the proceedings to any members wishing to read the transcripts. We will put the copy in the library and limit you to three weeks' loan initially. (Note: The borrower will be asked to pay postage both ways – Ed.)

The post conference tour started out with two coach loads of foreign visitors. The first one was mainly of Italians who left us for home at Wellington at the end of the North Island tour. I must mention the only New Zealander left with us in the South Island tour. Juliet Neilson is the immediate Past President of the New Zealand Iris Society. She obviously was very closely involved with the Conference itself but I feel that even more it was she who planned our garden visits, and, not only that, she stayed with us as our guide and general informant. That we saw so much of interest is due to her planning and we all owe her a great deal. Our bus driver in the South Island was also a great provider of interesting snippets of information. At an early stage whilst in Nelson I asked if he would tell us (me really) the various sheep breeds and their hybrid crosses. His knowledge fell short of that. Silence in fact, so I had to find out myself. The whole subject is very interesting and shows how seriously New Zealand has to concentrate on its farming. If you can get a copy of Book no. 2 you will see why you should stand back in admiration.

The gardens were chosen because we were at the height of the tall-bearded season which we do not often mention in our newsletters. There were occasional *Spurias*, P.C.I.'s and of course Siberians. I will only mention the first garden in the North Island, near to Rotorua. It belonged to a prominent rose grower who obviously grew irises but of much greater interest to me were the large beds wholly devoted to lilies; Asiatic, Oriental and Trumpet lilies all mixed together. I can safely say I have never seen such vigorous and healthy lily plants in my life. Nor do I expect to see their like in Europe. It is a great testament to the wonderful volcanic soils. Mrs. Liddell had only started her garden here 4 years ago.

Twenty-four of us set off on the ferry across to the South Island. Seven from Britain; the others were from Australia, the U.S.A.; France and Germany. Prominent among the Americans were Mike and Anne Lowe who conscientiously photographed and recorded pretty well all the tall-bearded they saw. They usually recognised and named most plants at twenty paces distant. Their knowledge was fantastic. Future generations of iris growers will thank them for their diligence in recording the history of the tall-bearded race. To cut things short at this stage the most prominent and striking garden in the South Island was of course, or so I think, in Otago, in the old gold-mining area at Ophir. William and Susan Cockerill call themselves week-end gardeners. They have created among a stupendous rocky outcrop a garden of tall bearded irises and paeonies. They have extremely hot summers and very cold winters and have registered New Zealand's coldest temperature. The rainfall is probably less than 15ins. per annum and obviously the irises and paeonies need irrigation. However the plant that set my imagination thinking was an expanding colony of iris bucharica. This of course is probably the easiest of the junos to grow but it shows the great potential of the junos and of course the aril-type iris for this area. It was a totally unexpected surprise even if at this stage the foliage was already withered. I must also mention Maple Glen right at the bottom of the South Island with every conceivable tree and shrub in beautiful condition but it was also the home of a wonderful iris ensata collection. I was very impressed and I will confess I purchased one and have got it home. They get over 40 ins. of rain per annum here.

I will now describe an even more breath-taking surprise. At Alexander in the Clutha valley, south of Ophir, where it is claimed that the world's finest apricots are grown we were taken to Jolendale Park. Dr. Enny Manning maintains a group of tall-bearded irises that I do not think many of us saw. The Lowes probably did but I was engrossed and very interested in the collection of conifers, eucalypts and similar plants that her husband Jolyon has experimented with for over forty years. This area has an annual maximum of 13" of rain, as dry as any Australian desert. Various plants from similar environments worldwide are tried, with accent on survivability. They are watered to start with and then left pretty well to their own devices. Growing among solid rock they have to be planted with a crowbar! A truly great experience to see: for instance Pinus Coulteri bearing its enormous cones. The whole of my trip was worth this one afternoon. I recommend this plantation to any visitor to New Zealand.

There is more news to come from Jolyon Manning. For many years he has studied, along with others, the world's weather patterns. At the time of our visit the world's climate experts were deliberating at The Hague. Mr. Manning was not at all dogmatic. Rather he was very persuasive in claiming that the climate changes we are experiencing were due 80 per cent to sun spot activity and a mere 20 per cent to environmental over-heating. He predicts that for the next twenty years the sunspots will settle down and so will our extremes of climate. I hope this is good news! I am relying on it.

Now a few notes on the Conference -

Clarence Mahan in my opinion wrote the most interesting paper: on Iris Myths and Legends. In a most erudite and at the same time most humorous lecture he showed that it is not just the popular gardening books which perpetuate mistaken ideas as gospel. He proved that generations of botanists can be misled and that with many iris species basic scientific research and revision of ideas is needed. He gives several examples. It was a pity he could not attend to read it himself; he would have had the audience in 'paroxysms of mirth' as the expression goes.

Tony Hall, the renowned cultivator from Kew, gave an up-to-date review of his speciality, the Scorpiris or Juno Group. It was a pity that he did not come with us on our tour. I would have loved to have heard his opinion of the growing possibilities of upland Otago.

Bob Hollingsworth reviewed latest developments in Siberian breeding and whilst extolling the tetraploids recognised that several equally good hybridisers had stuck to diploids. One of these breeders was with us throughout: Anne Mae Miller. I would like to hear her private comments on the Hollingsworth latest. Personally I remarked in private that the Siberians appear to be undergoing a nervous breakdown, but I am a "stick in the mud". Judge for yourself from the illustrations in the latest B.I.S. Year book. You will be able to see some of his plants sent for the 2002 Conference at Bristol.



Dr Thomas Tamberg acknowledges his debt to Currier McEwen and use of colchicine to get fertile tetraploid forms of previously sterile diploid hybrids such as the Calsibe hybrids; seed he germinates by seed cutting method. He considers that the 40 chromosome chrysographes group are not closely related to the 28 group. Dr. Tamberg invites international co-operation in his breeding plans. He has also generously sent 40+ plants for the 2002 Convention. Dr. Tamberg's internet home page is given as <http://home.t-online.de/home/Dr.T.u.C.Tamberg>

Jean Witt reviewed the last 50 years of P.C.I. breeding and looked forward to more use of the so far little used Californian sps. with the hardier douglasiana and tenax that live further north. She stressed the need for more breeders to take up the cause of colder climate hybrids based on *I. tenax* and to produce strains more tolerant of wetter summers than in their homelands.

I will now recommend three paper-backs for you:

1. Wild Central: Natural history of Otago by Peat & Patrick: University of Otago Press, Dunedin. ISBN 1 877133 65 5
2. Sheep Breeds of New Zealand by Meadows – published by Reed of Auckland. ISBN 0 7900 0583 2  
(Both of these books are very well illustrated and show the wonderful terrain and both wild and introduced animal life.)
3. The New Zealand Bed and Breakfast Book. Pelican Publishing Co. Gretna, Louisiana 70053, U.S.A. ISBN 1 56554 648 2. Available in the U.K. (Even if you never visit you will read of wonderful country people who describe their homes and environments in thumbnail sketches, and thus give a view of New Zealand, each quite unique and enthralling.)

It goes without saying that I enjoyed both the Jubilee Conference; also the tours of the gardens; and in meeting so many interesting people. All of our party are indebted to the hospitality of our hosts. The welcome they gave us and the heaps of food they pressed on us in a most generous way belied the concerns some may have had at the fragile state of their country's economy. Those memories will live with me for many years to come, for which they have my best wishes and sincere thanks.

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT –**

As usual, your secretary has little to say. The Group's administration runs smoothly and several new members have been recruited - Philip is a splendid salesman and ropes people in wherever he goes. We hope you liked his first foray into colour, the pictures came up well and the plant is curious. What did you think it was? (See editorial).

I have received news that the AIS has awarded a Hybridiser's Medal to John Taylor of Australia for his work with Louisiana Irises. He certainly does produce splendid plants and we do congratulate him on the well deserved acknowledgment. I am told that his plants are in great demand in America where they tend to do better than the home raised varieties. These plants are becoming more popular in this country too and turn up in surprising places, Lincolnshire, for instance. My guess is that for the best results you need a site where the ground warms up quickly in spring. Er - could we have a Louisiana Specialist ?

You will be glad to hear that the Canadian plants seem to have survived this last year in good form and all we can hope for is that they survive being over-watered this past autumn. Certainly, in my Sussex garden we have had some 18" of rain already and if you have suffered on a similar scale then most of your autumn fertilisers will already have been washed away and you must be prepared to do a lot more in the spring. Whatever you normally do, give the plants additional quantities when they are growing fast: watch them closely because a lot can happen in a fortnight if the weather is encouraging. Remember, too, that if the ground is sodden then liquid fertilisers are not really to the point: better to make small holes around the plants with a dibber and fill with powder or granular compounds and leave the roots to help themselves.

We are more than glad to welcome Clare Dodsworth as representative for the North-East and Brita Carson as representative for Scotland. In these days of burgeoning regional independence, what about volunteers from some of the other areas and Wales in particular? Have a look at other people's reports and see if you couldn't do just as well? And the New Zealand Symposium seems to have been a great success although the weather got a bit British towards the end. Raymond will be writing a full report so I leave the details to him. So, with the Newsletter properly back on timing, let me wish you a much better season next year than you might expect at present. Anne

#### EDITORIAL -

This newsletter is larger and later than planned; so much for planning and timing! But I thought you would like me to include Raymond's New Zealand report; the latest exciting news of our website; and other recent developments. While it is my intention to make more use of line-drawings, and in this respect Mrs. P.J. (Jane) Cole has offered her artistic help, I have yet to be assured that colour printing and its extra cost is the direction that the majority of members wish to follow. Consequently colour will be kept to a minimum until I get a firm mandate. Although I am convinced that colour enhances a publication if it is used effectively to develop appreciation of content, it really is a question of "how much are you prepared to pay?" This year it has been necessary to increase the membership subscription by £1.00 to cover increases in paper and printing costs. I estimate that one full colour page per newsletter could increase annual membership cost by a further £1.00. Your comments are invited. Anyone seeing the latest edition of the SIGNA newsletter will be very impressed by the beauty of the colour pages. The same can be said for the colour content of the S.P.C.N.I. web site.

My main concerns include the lack of response to queries raised in earlier newsletters and the reluctance of some members to take part – there is an improvement, but in the terms of some of my school reports – "could do better"! I have in mind the absence of replies to the issue raised by Derek Carver (N.L.40 – April 1997) on the risks arising on importing P.C.'s; and more recently, in the last newsletter, inviting suggestions about the identity of the plant in the photographs sent in by Mr. M.J. Maule. I'll take them in that order-

I am quite convinced (but could be wrong!) that unless plants of P.C. hybrids can be delivered to the buyer without any delay, purchasing divisions is a risky business; drying out is fatal, which no amount of t.l.c. can overcome. The beginner, at least, would be well advised to buy seed from reputable sources; purchasing divisions of named varieties only when there is an assurance of proper (moist) packaging and speedy delivery. I consider it essential that these divisions are received within four or five days of plants being lifted and divided. I am convinced white roots must be active (or activated) to succeed!

As to the colour photograph in the last newsletter Anne and Jennifer were good enough to spare time for comment. Their views are that it is indeed a very interesting puzzle. The multiple parts are discounted as this is not at all unusual. Anne has commented upon this in previous reports. However, to have so many is out of the ordinary for this occurrence. Both Anne and Jennifer agree that the markings closely resemble those of Sino-Siberian (40-chr.) hybrids, as do the individual parts, allowing for the distortion caused by multiplicity. The apparent shortness and angle of the stem, and apparently widely spread shoots (remember identification from photographs is always difficult!) could be due to the presence in breeding of *I. prismatica*. It is known that a hybrid (*I. chrysographes* x *I. prismatica*) has been bred by Marty Schafer. This investigation will continue if the plant has survived its move to Somerset.

Companion planting has been to the forefront of my iris garden layout plans in recent years. This is due, no doubt, to past comments from members of my family during their years of residence here in Aldridge "What, not more irises!" This latest brainstorm was brought on when reading an article written by Ed Schreiner in an A.I.S. Bulletin, but more about that in the next Newsletter. In the meantime why not drop me a line telling me of any garden plants you have found to be ideal companions for irises.

The development of a Web site is well under way; and for this we are indebted to Alun Whitehead, our new Membership Secretary. In skeletal form at present, our Website structure should be finalised by the date of the next newsletter, in which further details will be given. In the meantime why not have fun and surf



<<http://www.gbi.org.uk>> from time to time to see how it develops. I suggest you wait until mid March to surf Alun's site, when a new format will be in place at <<http://www.auldenfarm.co.uk>>

During the past year I have extended the Group's publicity, with gratifying results. Membership application forms were made available at the Chelsea Flower Show; at member nurseries and at the Three Counties Spring Gardening Festival at Malvern. This year's B.I.S. publicity at R.H.S. Westminster and (possibly, but not yet confirmed) at Chelsea has been master-minded by Berney Baughen. Following the resignation of Norma Harris as Membership Secretary, referred to in earlier reports, Alun Whitehead has been good enough to take over this vital post, and will be able to publicise the work of the Group at Shows at which he and Jill exhibit during the year.

Individual leaflets will be available giving an introduction to several different series of irises including Japanese and Pacific Coast irises, Siberians and Water-loving irises. Of the nine "interest-promoting" leaflet types published, four of the iris sections fall within the ambit of the Beardless Iris Group. These can be purchased from me for 15pence each plus postage if you have friends who might be interested in joining the B.I.S. and/or the Group. The Group's thanks are due to Jennifer Hewitt and Norman Payne for making photographs available for use. Jennifer has also provided slides for background use in the design of a colour poster. Thanks are due also to Berney Baughen for typesetting the revised membership leaflet, without charge to the Group, following the increase in subscriptions and change in Membership Secretary.

It is hoped to extend this publicity this summer with help from a friend of long-standing, Tim Porter, Managing Director of Hollybush Nurseries Ltd., who has successfully competed in large-scale displays at N.E.C. Birmingham Gardeners' World Exhibitions since the mid '90's. A member of our Group for several years, these Nurseries attract approximately 1000 visitors each weekend and it is an ideal location, sited approximately 1/4 mile from junction 11 of M.6. If this is to go ahead I shall need offers of help to man the stand and to supply plants for display. The third weekend in June is a likely date, but only if there is sufficient support for this new venture, at which I hope to include B.I.S. and the West & Midlands Iris Group publicity. Please let me know if you are willing to lend a hand, blooms or plants. Early response please as I must accept this provisional offer by the end of March, in order that display planning can be approved.

**FINANCIAL REPORT** – The Group's finances are sound. With £798.95 to our credit in a "premier" account at Bradford & Bingley plc, at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2001, our estimated net assets amount to approximately £550.0. In other words we have at least a year's running expenses in hand, taking advance payments and current expenditure into account. This balance will allow a little experimentation with colour in the next newsletter but I do need to know your views. The position relating to the conversion of the Society to plc status will be clarified by the date of the next newsletter, when an audited account will be published. Whatever happens the Group will be better off as a result of my action to convert the status of its account from a "Deposit" account to one of "share-holding membership", although this has caused a conflict of interest.

Apart from savings due to delayed publications, for which members having made advance payments will be credited, our surplus is due in no small part to the generosity of several members; either by cash donations; plant sales or other indirect financial help. Details will appear in the next newsletter. Thank you all very much.

It has not proved possible for Norma Harris to take on the responsibility of Treasurer or, as subsequently mentioned, to continue in the post of Membership Secretary. A new house and other commitments prevent it. The Group is indebted to Norma for helping out over a period in which I was experiencing difficulties in meeting my several voluntary commitments having taken on far too many following Ruby's death. I am taking steps to ease the situation but it would be a relief to me if another member could take on the work of Treasurer. I would then be in the same position as the Membership Secretary, an Assistant Treasurer accounting for income received, but leaving payments and presentation of the broader picture to someone else. This would leave me with editing the Newsletter; indexing of the newsletter articles and the Library.

Another alternative is for someone to volunteer for the post of Editor, initially to share duties, to bring the newsletter onto a twice-yearly publication. It is an extremely interesting job but at 80 years of age it is time for me to start handing over some of my duties, as delays in publication are causing some concern.



An ideal situation would be for another member altogether to take over the duties of Librarian, with responsibility for maintaining an index of newsletter articles. Library duties are very light, but the service could be extended, to the benefit of both members and of the Group; essential if we are to extend our membership. To sum up, I am quite happy to hand over completely; work with another; or carry on as now with the newsletter for as long as I am able; but, quite frankly, you ought to have someone in mind to take over as I am now experiencing intermittent spells of ill-health and this disrupts the newsletter time-table.

## **MEMBERSHIP-**

**New members** – We welcome twelve new members to the Group. They are-

Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants of Whitchurch, Hampshire – This resulted from a chance meeting with members of this family firm at the B.B.C. "Gardeners' World" Exhibition at N.E.C. Birmingham. Their stand had an attractive display of the diploid *Ensata* hybrid 'Gracieuse'. Our contact at Whitchurch, Rosy Hardy, has kindly offered to display membership leaflets at this family Nursery.

Mrs. Patricia Howard of Hidden Valley Gardens, Treesmill, Nr. Par, Cornwall PL24 2TU. Mrs. Howard writes – 'I am a keen plantsperson and have recently moved from Yorkshire to Cornwall. The climate and soil are very different. I now have 4 acres of moist clay loam PH6.3; the land is gently sloping with a spring fed pond, is sheltered and open to the sun. Now I have the opportunity to experiment with irises which like these conditions and would be glad of any suggestions of types of iris and best sources to start a collection. Eventually I shall create a display garden and small nursery, and will keep in touch with progress reports'

Jay and Terri Hudson of 33450 Little Valley Road, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 are active members of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris who have served on the Executive Committee; Jay as President and Terri as Secretary-Treasurer. This membership came about after surfing the Society's colourful website pages at [www.pacificcoastiris.org](http://www.pacificcoastiris.org) and obtaining permission to reprint from them. A reciprocal financial arrangement; I now hope to have seedlings from seed they sent me, with spare to distribute to group members.

Kelway's Nursery, Langport, Somerset. This is a welcome addition to our list of Nursery members. Kelways are a small iris nursery with a keen interest in *I. sibirica* and *I. ensata*. They will be better known on an international basis for their renowned dahlias and peonies. Kelways will have one of the display gardens for the B.I.S. convention to be held in May 2002, based on The Holiday Inn Plaza Hotel, Bristol. Many overseas hybridists have generously sent plants, approximately 500 at the last count, including many new introductions. Our contact here is David Root, Nursery Manager. At the close of the Wisley *Ensata* Trials in September 1999, for replanting, Dr. Currier McEwen donated some of his introductions for this display. Visitors will also be able to see plants sent by Dr. & Mrs R. Hollingworth of Williamstown, Michigan, U.S.A. and by Dr. Tamberg of Berlin, among many others. And of course this is the outlet for many of the plants raised by Cy. Bartlett

Mrs. Lyn Noakes of 81 Dark Lane, Romsley, W. Midlands, B62 0PJ. She writes – "I have been gardening here for 24 years and am unfortunately a plantaholic. I especially cannot resist growing plants from seed (any plants not just iris). At the moment there are dozens of pots of *Sibiricas*, *Laevigatas* and *pseudacorus* growing on in my pond; I hope for some flowers this year. They will be added to the *ensata* and Louisiana hybrid seed bought this year. (I suppose the Louisianas will not survive here – but I won't be SURE until I try!) Plants of *Fulva* and *Fulvala* are new and seem to have settled in well. I also grow *foetidissima* (I would like the white-seeded variety), *reticulatas* and a few species in raised troughs; and *unguicularis*. The only bearded I can grow is 'Florentina' – heavy clay soils and slugs make them difficult."

Mrs. Anne Marvin of Pinewood, 56 Cockleton Lane, Gurnard, Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO31 8JD. – Mrs. Marvin tells me that in the year 2000 she had a good flowering season although heavy showers damaged many of the larger *ensata* blooms. She obtained her collection of over 40 plants from various sources including Norman Payne, and hopes to go on increasing in variety. Mrs. Marvin has about 15 different *Sibiricas* and a few Pacific Coast irises. Anne's garden faces South and West and is situated on the North side of the Island about a quarter of a mile from the Solent. The soil is a mixture of gravel, sand and clay in banded stratum westwards. *Ensatas* are grown in shallow ponds and long plastic tanks for the younger

plants. Anne's efforts have been rewarded with a good show of blooms with plants established for two years. The rest are to flower, hopefully, in the 2001 season. Ensatas planted in the ground close to the bog tanks (but not in them) seem to have made much better growth than those in parts of the tanks.

Mrs. Marvin's love affair with ensatas began in France with Princess Sturza's garden. She has made good progress but would still welcome help, comments and advice, particularly in the identification of some plants which do not conform with the descriptions given in the limited material available.

Mr. & Mrs. J. Mason of 81 South Barcombe Road, Childwall, Liverpool, Merseyside L16 7QE joined following my meeting with them at the Nursery and Garden of Kim & Maggie Davis at Lingen, Nr. Bucknell, Shropshire, where there is a colourful regional collection of sibiricas. Mr. Mason tells me that he has interests in Fuchsias and Alpines, growing a wide range of plants in his small garden. With his wife their joint interests include membership of the A.G.S., B.I.S. and the Fuchsia Society.

Mr. & Mrs. Glynn Roberts of 56 Oakley Street, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury SY3 7JY. Glyn and Pamela are members of the West & Midlands Iris Group. As neighbours of the late Doris Hansford, they are endeavouring to collect as many of her introductions of tall bearded irises as is possible. Glyn is the Group's Show Secretary and has recently taken on the job of Editor of the Group's newsletter.

Ms. Julianne Statham of 5 Park Hill Road, Harbourne, Birmingham B17 9SJ. I have yet to contact Julianne and hope to introduce her in the next newsletter.

#### **Changes of address –**

Mrs. Julia L. Haywood has moved to 86 Thorneywood Mount, Thorneywood, Nottingham NG3 2PZ.

Mr. J. and Mrs. B. Horsburgh have moved to Ashwater Cottage, Ashwater, Beaworthy, Devon EX21 5ES.

Mr. M. and Mrs. G. Maule have moved to 23 North Croft, Williton, Somerset, TA4 4RP.

#### **Resignations, etc –**

Shortly before publication of this newsletter our Membership Secretary confirmed to me that she wished to hand over the work of Membership Secretary as soon as possible. I have reported on this in my Finance Report and thank Norma for her help since 1998, wishing her well for the future.

It is regretted that our Eastern Regional representative, Mrs Shirley Ryder of Colchester, has been obliged to retire from this post and from membership of the Group on the grounds of ill-health and personal family circumstances. We thank her for her past reports and send our good wishes for improved health.

Another resignation is that of Mr. Norman Bennett who informs me that he is obliged to retire from the post of Laevigata Specialist on grounds of age and for other personal reasons. We extend our good wishes to Mr. Bennett whose experience in this field will be sorely missed.

On a sadder note I have two reports –

I am informed that one of our members, Ken Edmondson of Bewdley, is seriously ill. Our thoughts and best wishes are with Ken and Diana at this time.

A newsletter addressed to Mrs. Janet M. King of 220 Hyde End Road, Spencer's Wood, Reading, Berks has been returned to me with an endorsement on the envelope "Deceased – return to sender". I have no further information. Ed.



## **REGIONAL REPORTS (for the year 2000)**

### **London region –**

Yes, well, London has been as wet as anywhere else. Mercifully, my garden is well above the pond which, being technically a reservoir, has been organised to cope with most of what the weather can throw on it. This was a less disastrous year for slugs though the snails have eaten the pods away from the seeds of the foetidissimas which give a rather odd effect. There is now no doubt in my mind that the giant slugs will eat up the small ones which have perished in the beer dregs (I've watched them) and I think they may be responsible for the myriads of empty snail shells; we don't have any glow-worms here.

Inevitably, my Evansias flowered splendidly while I was away on holiday and it follows that the only plants which set seed were the ones which lost their labels long ago. Even the few hand pollinated ones failed to take. I was all lined up to do a major replant this autumn and most of that has had to be ignored since most of the garden is like a wet sponge. I did take some surplus LAs down to Sussex and parked them on the edge of the stream bed from where they were promptly washed away. The schizostylis coccinea enjoyed themselves, but the unfortunate autumn crocuses were completely washed out. I. lazica is taking a dim view of matters though there was one flower back in late August. All I can really hope for is some nice drying winds in the later part of November. Of course, if we get another warm winter it may be possible to go on shifting plants late into the year.

Anne Blanco White.

### **Midlands region –**

An otherwise eventful and successful season was marred and saddened by the sudden death of Peter Hewitt in November last. Fortunately Peter had been able to accompany Jennifer to the last of the season's visits to members' gardens.

In the absence of our Chairman, in New Zealand, I represented the Group at the Service of Thanksgiving for Peter's life. This was held at the small village Parish Church at which Peter had been a Church Warden for many years. Among a packed congregation were officers and members of the British Iris Society and of the West and Midlands Iris Group, including Cy. Bartlett who delivered a reading.

Peter's lengthy service to the West and Midlands Iris Group took many forms. I suppose my enduring memory will be of his work as liaison officer for the annual Three Counties Spring Gardening Shows at Malvern, where for many years, working with Jennifer, he was responsible for the arrangements for setting up, manning and dismantling of the Group's Stand; and where as representative of the Group he looked after our interests in prior discussions with Three Counties and R.H.S. officials; a responsibility recently relinquished. Group Annual Shows saw Peter in a similar capacity; transporting and setting up the Group's Display Stands as a backdrop to the Show tables.

Peter's work for many years as Editor of the Group's newsletter will remain a visible record and reminder of his dedicated and tangible contribution to the continuing success and expansion of the Group. And finally, in his role as Secretary of the Steering Committee for the proposed B.I.S. Convention at Bristol in May 2002, the structure of the Convention, now agreed in principle by the Society, was moulded.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Peter's widow Jennifer, our Sibirica Specialist, and all members of their family. Having met daughters Elinor and Rachel, with their respective families, you will be happy to know, as I am, that Jennifer has the love and support which is so necessary and helpful at this sad time.

The Group's activities are reported on in the Society's Year Book for 2000, except for the most recent visit in October last, to the home and garden of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Atkins. The talk while there, given by Clive Russell, and illustrated with slides, gave a very interesting and up-to-date insight of Irises and Irisarians of the U.S.A. Stephen is very interested in grasses and other plants as well as irises. This attractive garden, set at the foot of The Malverns reflects these interests. It is a well laid out, balanced and colourful mix of a large collection of iris species and hybrids blended with other plants; a pleasure to visit and a real credit to our hosts.

In all a successful season with good bloom, interesting visits and friendly hospitality. Inclement weather spoiled the set of pollen so seed is sparse and the extensive floods of the late autumn, recently followed by heavy frosts may have caused extensive damage, not only to property, but to plants as well. Check soon!

The Group's plans for the B.I.S. May 2002 Convention will be reported in a future Newsletter and on our website. This will be an ideal opportunity for members of the Group for Beardless Irises to meet. Do join us! Philip Allery

#### **North-eastern region -**

##### **Miss Clare Dodsworth, our new North-eastern regional representative, introduces herself-**

I thought I should start by briefly introducing myself. I am 24 years old and work as an Information Specialist (a fancy name for a Computer Programmer). I live at home with my parents and my brother in Darlington, Co. Durham. I have been interested in irises for a long time and have been growing them for a number of years. I have only been a member of the BIS for about three years, but I hope that what I lack in experience I can make up for in enthusiasm.

Here in Darlington we garden on solid clay, which is dreadful to work with but I find the Sibericae don't seem to mind. I have tried growing bearded irises in the garden previously and, whilst they performed well the first year, I think it is too damp for them over the winter and the slugs have a tendency to completely devour them when you aren't looking. I have a number of Sibericae in our garden of which 'Tropic Night' (Morgan 1931) was the first. This is still going strong and never fails to put on a good display no matter how neglected it is. We split this into four a couple of years ago, it still flowered well the following summer and all four clumps are now thriving. Other Sibericae that I have found to do well are 'Snow Queen' and *I. forrestii*. *Pseudacorus* 'Variegata' resided in the garden for a few years and failed to flower. I have since moved this into our pond and it has flowered very well ever since. My latest purchase was *I. chrysographes*, this caught my eye at a plant sale and just had to come home with me.

I have tried growing irises from the BIS seed list and this seems to be going quite well. I planted a number of Sibericae seeds in 1998, some flowered the following year, but this year the majority of them flowered. The period of bloom this year was from 17<sup>th</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> June, however the torrential rainstorms during June that caused flooding in many parts of the region did not help matters. We were not badly affected by the rain, however some of the iris blooms would have lasted longer if they hadn't been dashed. I have also tried some of the Californicae and although they seem to be growing well none of them have flowered yet. In 1999 I tried some Ensata seeds and again the seedlings seem to be surviving so I will keep you informed on their progress.

At some point I think I will have to be selective and remove some of the seedlings from the garden that are not so good. This mainly due to the fact that we have a fairly small garden and having the entire garden consisting of irises is not really a feasible option!

**Southern region** – Parts of Berkshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex do not appear to be covered for regional report purposes. If a member living in this locality would be prepared to submit reports from time to time it would help to present an overall picture. Please volunteer – Ed.

#### **South-eastern region -**

##### **Mrs. Olga Wells, our new representative for this region, introduces herself -**

I hasten to say at the outset that I am a "volunteer" reporter and not an expert on beardless iris, but I hope I can relate what observations I've made in the dry and droughty (most years) south-east corner of England. Sue Pierce, in her former role as Editor, asked new members of the G.B.I. to write a piece about their gardens. I'm guilty of never having complied with this request – chiefly because I joined the Group seeking to gain knowledge. I really didn't feel my small plot would be of interest to anyone else. (What made her change her mind you may well say later!) Maybe now, however, I can kill two birds with one stone and you can see how those of us with small plots and not too much rainfall try to grow our iris. Here goes, then, with a description of my garden followed by a bit about some of the irises I grow or attempt to grow.

I live in Kent and garden, not on the chalk downs, not on Wealden clay, but on the edge of the Greensand Ridge which lies between the two. The soil I would describe as a well-drained, neutral, medium loam, which will grow pretty well anything bar rhododendrons. The land was classed as Grade 1 agricultural land at the time it was built on and once grew all kinds of top fruit (apples, pears, plums, cherries), soft fruit, Kent cob nuts, hops and so on. I can't remember if the houses were built 8 or 16 to the acre when we came here in 1965 but the gardens are fairly compact. The plot is all on one level and shaped like a right-angle triangle with the apex cut off. The frontage along the base of the triangle faces due south. The house is about half way up the perpendicular side with suburbia to the east and very pleasant and still rural countryside to the



west. Along the hypotenuse lies the original windbreak, or farm hedge, of damson, with which I have a love/hate relationship, which we are not allowed to remove even if we wanted to, and which affects the whole garden. The plus side to this hedge is that it is full of blossom in the spring; is host to friendly hedgehogs, birds and butterflies; is see-through in the winter but not in summer; and keeps out gales and marauding cattle, horses and burglars – so far! The down side is that it puts on three feet of untidy, spiny, ungainly growth every summer, which is awkward to trim. It harbours slugs, snails, wasp nests, earwigs and aphids – particularly black fly – and every conceivable kind of hedgerow weed grows out of it, especially bindweed. In dry weather, and particularly at fruiting time, it sucks every last drop of water from the soil and, worst of all, it suckers everywhere. The nine gnarled old regularly spaced damson trees along the hedge, which look like escapees from illustrations in a child's fairy tale, are gradually dying from old age, drought and honey fungus. I have mixed feelings about their demise, but the once shady north garden is now getting much more light and sun and the sunny south garden is gradually becoming shadier now trees of other types are gradually maturing. These then are the sort of conditions iris have to grow in. I water the garden hardly at all – only seedlings or very new plantings; something very precious or pots. Water restrictions or hose-pipe bans are usually in place by the time we need to water here.

So, now to the plants. I grow several varieties of *I. unguicularis* against the south wall of the house and these continue to flower well in spite of the shade from plants that have grown up in front of them. The more robust, but least favourite of these is *I. lazica*, which has become ground-cover under a huge *Euphorbia mellifera*. Next year I shall have to do a rescue job on some of these and risk planting sections in sunnier but more exposed areas of the garden. The foliage is sheared back by half in October to show off the flowers better when they come. They get occasional top dressings of sulphate of potash but no other feed and I try to remember, usually too late, to put down slug bait when the buds start to show, often in late autumn in the south-east.

The PCI's do well in the shadier, rootier parts. The best of these these last two years was Amethyst Crystal, which is a Kent raised variety. This long-established plant, growing in the shade of a *Clerodendron* tree, grew to 4ft. plus across and half of it was growing over the paving. These sections were removed and potted last September, and they all grew away well. Plants and seedlings do pretty well in pots provided they never dry out completely, but I have found to my cost that to go away for a couple of days when the weather turns baking hot can be fatal. No amount of TLC will revive any dried out plants so I try to get plants out of pots and into the ground as soon as space and conditions permit. I have obtained named PCI's through the B.I.S. plant sales scheme and from the Wisley trials when they have become available. These do quite well if good size pieces go straight into the ground without delay. However they are slow to establish and take up to three years to look anything at all. Some that are supposed to be good doers, like Lincoln Imp, refuse to grow away at all and dwindle into extinction. I am hoping to do better with my own seedlings which should start to flower next year.

I like the evansias, but they don't seem to like me and I obviously haven't got the sort of conditions they like. Perhaps someone else can give me a few tips on growing these lovely plants. Nor do I grow many bulbous iris, mainly due to lack of space; although I would dearly like to try some English iris. I fear my conditions would probably not be suitable for them. Incidentally, why does one so seldom see them for sale?

I am very, very fond of the siberians. They look good for most of the year and do better in my mixed plantings than their bearded cousins, who I am always rescuing from intrusive neighbours. They are probably on the borderline of being happy here but they do get extra attention at planting time, and are fed regularly and mulched. The ants love them too and build little castles round the base of the fans to farm the colonies of black fly they place there. Ants are the one pest I really have to take action against with the sibs. The diploids do better here than the "tets" and smaller flowered varieties make really good flowerful clumps. I would not want to garden without 'Mrs. Rowe', 'Summer Sky' and 'Snow Prince'. The best looking diploid in the garden this year was 'Soft Blue'. I love it in spite of its snaky stems. The colour is wonderful across the garden and I like the shape of its blooms, and it flowers and flowers. The best of the "tets" was 'Silver Edge'. I am gradually removing most of them from the garden as they do not seem to have the vigour and flower power I would expect from tetraploids. They are taking too much time and space without delivering the goods, so they're going on the allotment where they'll have more room and less competition for nutrients. Here I can grow them for cut flowers and competitions and I'm sure conditions will be more to their liking.

The ensatas and moisture lovers I grow in containers and stand them in shallow watering trays during the growing season. I would not be able to grow them in any other way and they do very well like this. This year's best was 'Mysterious Monique' which put up stem after stem of those wonderful dark red flowers.

Pink 'Party Line' did almost as well. Last, but not least, are the spurias of which I grow a few as, again, they are lovely in mixed plantings and they never look shabby. Some that I planted were incorrectly named and "mucked up" the colour schemes and had to be shunted to different locations. They settle surprisingly quickly and begin to flower in their second or third season. I suppose they get enough moisture in the early part of the year to carry them past flowering into the drier months. Current favourite is 'Blue Lassie', but I'm hoping the wonderful orange-yellow 'Destination' will start to strut its stuff next year. I was going to mention some of the beardless iris that have just completed their trial period at Wisley, but I think I have prattled on long enough and these no doubt will be written up in the B.I.S. Year Book.

That more or less completes the piece on my garden iris, apart from a very few species. They and hybridising and allotments and other people's beardless can wait for another time.

**(Mrs. Olga Wells sent me the first section of this report in Autumn 1999. – The footnote and postscript arrived in time for inclusion in this newsletter. Ed.)**

#### **FOOTNOTE: (December, 2000)**

Having moaned and groaned in the South and South East of England about lack of rain and ground water I think we had all better hush up. Before I went off to the Antipodes in mid-October I rushed about the garden and allotment putting plants in, taking plants out, moving them from here to there, gathering seeds, cutting grass, knowing that upon my return the hurley burley of Christmas would be upon me. My efforts were cut short by the onset of rain early in October and many jobs were left undone. The day of departure, I just made it across the River Medway before it overflowed and flooded Maidstone, the County Town of Kent. I was lucky there and fortunate, too, that I live on high ground and did not return weeks later to a flooded property. There is a lot to be said for not having a home on what were (and still are) flood plains or at the confluence of three rivers such as where Yalding sits.

Upon my return the garden looked a soggy, sodden mess. The rain has continued unabated for two months now. The grass squelches, leaves lie in wet layers; the north wind rushed up the long slope of the roof and down the steep scarp slope and tore the wall shrubs and their supports from the brickwork. They now rest, along with the dead stems of herbaceous plants, at peculiar angles where the weather has left them. There has been no opportunity to tidy up. It's a mess but I am hopeful that not too much has rotted. We shall see!

**And a POSTSCRIPT:** In Australia *Dietes grandiflora* and *D. bicolour* are used a great deal in municipal plantings and look splendid growing with agapanthus and Bird of Paradise flowers all along the central reservations, roundabouts and parking lots. In New Zealand, where it was much cooler; decidedly chilly at times; we saw many unusual combination of plants – the Chatham Island Forget Me Not growing with lavenders, flowering succulents used as groundcover for a Japanese maple; and Pacific Coast irises flowering at the same time and in the same garden as spurias, T.B's and evansias. Very odd. -  
Olga Wells

**South-western region – This very important region is currently without a representative. We would welcome a volunteer.**

#### **Scotland – Mrs Brita Carson, our Scottish regional representative introduces herself -**

As a new Scottish member of the BIS and the GBI I realise I'm expected to introduce myself and write a few words about the irises I grow. That is a bit tricky as most of my beautiful irises are 'beautiful irises to be' – still at the seedling stage apart from the ones I've bought or the ones I've badgered our ever obliging seed secretary, Margaret Criddle into digging up for me. Instead I rather rashly volunteered to compare the irises at the dry, cold, easterly Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh with those growing at Inverewe Garden situated a long way up the wet west coast of Scotland. It didn't turn out quite as I expected and Inverewe, warmed by the Gulf Stream and able to grow plenty of 'exotica' without fear of cold or frost, don't grow any more irises than I do. Although the sibiricas and chrysographes were strong in colour and vigour it was disappointing when my expectations were of seeing something special, at least a few Louisianas.

The visits to the two gardens were made at the beginning of June on consecutive weekends. As secretary of the Scottish Group of the Hardy Plant Society (HPS) I was attending a meeting of the Meconopsis Group at the Botanic. It was a gruelling morning of concentration, trying to learn and absorb so much information on *Meconopsis*. But our reward was a first look at the trial grounds of all the different meconopsis in full



bloom growing side by side - what an impressive sight. The Group is trying to clarify the names of the blue poppies and slot them into divisions, correctly and simply and then we will all use the same names – an optimistic vision which may take at least a year or two!

My second reward of the day came after the meeting – a warm afternoon, so delightful for a lazy stroll round the gardens looking at the irises. The timing was spot on and the last of the TBs were still hanging on but all the sibiricas were tall and splendid in full flower. Unable to distinguish the species I had to scramble in amongst the plants determined to find all the labels but fearing an angry shout at any minute. There were various forms of *Ii. chrysographes* and *versicolor* and lots of *Ii. sibirica*, *bulleyana*, *clarkei*, *longipetala* var. *pelogous*, *innominata*, and *I. sanguinea*. Also in flower were *Ii. setosa* ssp. *canadensis*, *hartwegii* ssp. *pinetorum*, *douglasiana*, and *lactea*. Not many of my beloved ensatas, just the beautiful *I. ensata* 'Snow Drift' coming gracefully into flower. Growing close by *I. germanica* 'Florentina' were *Iris* x *venusta* and *Iris* x *spaethii* which sent me scurrying for the books. Dykes describes *I. venusta* in 'The Genus Iris' as a pogoniris probably one of the numerous *sambucina* or *squalens* hybrids. Brian Mathew mentions quite a few named crosses between *I. variegata* and *I. pallida* so have these come out of the same stable? How high these irises grow: but then on a recent HPS visit we were allowed 'out the back' and behind the scenes we saw the manure mountains which the animals generously leave at the Highland Show and this is used as a mulch everywhere. No time for maturing, this is spread around almost immediately both as a fertiliser and weed suppressant and also to dissuade visitors like me!

In the new Chinese Garden a gushing waterfall cascades over enormous boulders and standing on the bridge I could see the labels of *I. laevigata* var. *alba* and *I. pseudacorus* but was that *I. wilsonii*? – it should be but the label was turned away from me – I think it was but then I wanted it to be – the colour was right but then it could have been *I. forrestii*. A hot day, the temptation was almost too much to jump down and go paddling up stream but that might have been pushing my luck and I didn't wish to be escorted out just yet. One label I could read at the far end of the rock garden was one of those 'wows', a really exciting find for me, *I. pseudonotha*, at least four feet high with gentle soft lilac/blue flowers looking far too delicate to withstand the fierce winds that often blow here in June.

The soil must have extremely good drainage combined with low rainfall for *I. japonica* x *confusa* to be so happy and flower so well. It has *I. tectorum* for company and they all snuggle into the west side of the large hothouse. Perhaps some warmth escapes through the glass to give them enough winter protection which they must need sitting here high on the hill. Walking through these gardens one winter's afternoon just at darkening, a light fall of snow froze instantly to become a crunchy white topping. My feet crunching the ice startled a fox looking for an easy meal amongst the tall flag irises round the pond.

There were signs of spring iris among the peat beds where the dying foliage had a label *I. reticulata* 'Cantab' but this was nothing to the excitement of this recent HPS visit when we went backstage into the glasshouses which contained pot after pot of alpine fashioning themselves, ready to perform their party piece in the outside alpine houses. Or at the other end were the pots drying out and resting now that their over indulgence of food and drink and even a bit of the other is finished for this year. There were labels of *Ii. winogradowii*, *histriodes*, *attica*, *aphylla*, *aucherii*, *bucharica*, *cycloglossa*, *dandfordiae* and *pumila* and not being on a specific iris hunt I probably missed a few. But the highlight was still to come past the cold frames which had to be covered in chicken wire to stop old Reynard from digging up plants in the gritty compost and there in a fourfoot high bulb frame was the plant I had longed to see ever since I was given Brian Mathew's 'The Iris' and saw the front cover. A pot with the label *I. korolkowii* and I just stood and gazed longingly at a couple of dead stalks sitting in a dried up pot with a few pebbles on top and several other similar bedfellows.

There will, of course be plenty of other ones I've missed so it will be essential to make return visits mid winter, late winter, early spring, mid spring and late spring as well as early summer and mid summer. Oh what a lovely excuse until I can drool over some of my own seedlings in flower.

## **Wales –**

For many years the late Harry Foster and his widow Maureen grew and registered many splendid irises grown in their garden at Crickhowell, Gwent. Before moving to Williton, Somerset, Mr. Martin Maule, wrote of his experience in growing many iris species and hybrids at his former home in Arthog so I know it is possible to grow many beardless irises in Wales. We now need a representative to recruit members and to submit regional reports from time to time.

- Ed.

**Ireland - Our former Membership Secretary reports on her visit to Ireland** - On July 9<sup>th</sup> last I and 28 other keen plantspeople from my local NCCPG group set off for a four day trip to Ireland, based around Dublin and organised through Brightwater holidays. We flew from Stanstead and were met at Dublin by our Coach and driver, Sean who stayed with us and entertained us throughout the trip. After a short stop for lunch we were off to our first garden 'Butterstream' in Trim, County Meath. The garden was a series of rooms. The first and my favourite was informal gravel paths side weaving through large mixed borders. Coming from dry East Anglia, I was surprised to see plants I would only grow in a bog area, by side with drought tolerant plants. There was a good variety of irises all in flower in the border. There were iris that looked like versicolor 'Kermesina', tall yellow spurias, several sibiricas and some very dark chrysographes. An iris that particularly intrigued us we were told was a sibirica, but it had very pendulous falls and was a very subtle mixture of bluey-grey and yellow, but they did not have a name for it. Several of the 'rooms' had a very formal element, with quite a lot of reconstructed buildings and the most recent development were two enormous parallel canals falling into large square tanks - but sadly not a water plant in sight (I think they were trying for a 'Versailles' effect!) The next day took us to The National Botanic Gardens of Glasnevin. We only had a morning here which was not long enough to cover the extensive planted areas. There were some wonderful glasshouses with lots of interesting tender plants, in particular a spectacular *Victoria amazonica*. Many of the plants thriving outside would struggle in our colder eastern climes - yet, having resolved not to take on so many tender plants I was busy filling my notebooks with names and descriptions of plants to scan seed lists for. There was an interesting looking clump of fleshy leaves which had finished flowering, labelled *Iris spathacea*. I finally tracked this down as *Morea spathulata*, but still could find no description.

The only other iris I spotted were a good display of tall bearded iris making a bold splash of colour. We could have stayed much longer in these interesting gardens if only there had been somewhere for refreshments - planned for next year we were told. The next day we visited 'Primrose Hill' in Lucan. This was a garden to appeal to all the keen plantsmen amongst us. There were winding informal paths round beds packed with unusual and beautiful plants, again with a good selection of iris. The greyish yellow was again on show, this time growing right next to *Iris forrestii*, whose habit it strongly resembled - so perhaps it was a hybrid. In the afternoon we visited Fairfield Lodge, a small formal garden in the Dublin suburbs which was a good example of the use of a few well chosen plants. The highlight of the trip was undoubtedly the last day's visit to the garden of Helen Dillon. The sunshine came out and the garden was displayed to perfection. I enjoyed it all the more in the knowledge that a perfect formal garden with a magnificent period house is nothing I could attain, so I could admire it without feeling too envious! There were many wonderful plants and Helen was in constant demand to supply names. There was a particularly lovely deep black *Iris chrysographes* 'Inshriach'. One of our group admired it and was promptly given a piece! - needless to say he has got to propagate it and divide it by 29! After being dragged reluctantly away, there was time for a few hours exploration of Dublin before our return flight took us home after a thoroughly enjoyable visit. (In sending me this report Norma commented on her interest in seeing so many irises she would only grow in bog areas - versicolor, forrestii and sibiricas growing in borders alongside quite drought tolerant plants).

**Norma has also been good enough to send me this book review, intended for the next newsletter, but included here because of its reference to Louisiana Irises. - Ed.**

## **Book Review – IRIS Flower of the Rainbow – by Graeme Grosvenor Kangaroo Press, (280 pages approx. A4)**

I spotted this in the book department of a local store and it seemed an ideal way to spend a Christmas book token. The initial attraction was the absolutely stunning photography. The book covers many iris, both bearded and beardless, as well as some associated species I had not heard of. As well as the wonderful pictures there are lists of recommended cultivars for most varieties of iris - I found this useful when choosing seed from the BIS lists. Although the author is Australian and obviously is describing cultivation in



that country, I still think it is a very practical book – particularly for someone like me who is still something of a novice. There is a large section on Louisiana Iris - which I had been trying to find out about previously without success. They look very beautiful with a wide range of colour and form. Some varieties are described as very vigorous and they tolerate pot cultivation quite well. (I would be interested to hear of anyone's experience of growing these in England). All in all I am delighted with this book and would thoroughly recommend it.

### **ENSATA REPORT – November, 2000 - Anne Blanco White**

There isn't really much to report on this front this year. The Wisley Trial has been replanted and so not judged, but a number of side issues can be raised. First and foremost, if this trial is to persist we need new cultivars from new breeders. There is no point in keeping the old forms indefinitely after they get into commerce. We can already accommodate some of the new ensata crosses with other species and, indeed, Sidney Linnegar and myself have high hopes of at least one of the Canadians. At the same time, I have raised the possibility of the trial being modified to accommodate some of the new inter- and intraspecific hybrids which are appearing. Wisley won't be able to give us any more space.

Then there is the matter of planting time. It really is important that Ensatas are replanted in early autumn so that their root systems are well established by spring. So much so, that if you receive plants at a time when you can't plant them out conveniently, they are better potted up in a fibrous compost and left until the spring when the whole caboodle can be put in a nice big hole and left to get on with it. After all, that is pretty much what you do when using them as water features. I did that with some I had in Sussex: they were parked on the edge of the stream bed in early March and produced a rather good show of flowers. I think they have survived the floods and certainly can't complain that they weren't mulched. Interestingly, the only one which set seed was the old diploid 'Hokkaido'

The third matter is that for flower bed planting at least the plants must be carefully watched for insect infestation and don't just mean our friendly, neighbourhood vine weevils. There are some good treatments for those creatures these days, but what I have in mind are things like 'chafers' and other underground grubs which eat roots. The loose soils and mulches associated with the wet-land irises are just what these pests really enjoy and by the time you have discovered that they were in residence the damage may be irremediable. If you read my article on 'scorch' in the previous edition you will know that it is the symptom to watch for. With luck, with an extensive root system to feed on, the smaller rhizomes of the ensatas may have escaped damage. This means that only part of the plant will have been affected. Cut the damaged area away because you don't want any side effects from rotting material. If it is still early in the season, it may be worth while to lift the plant regardless and give it a phytosanitary check. By that I mean that you clean all the soil off the roots watching carefully for caterpillar-like creatures. The plants may need a good deal of T.L.C., but as long as you are quick about the operation they should survive well enough. However you replant, keep them damp, but not wet (weather permitting) until the autumn. Thrips, which are responsible for those nasty brown-black veinings on the leaves, also need to be kept under control and, again, there are various treatments and they should be applied. First, read the label and instructions on the containers preferably before you buy them. It is not a good idea to have the potting shed cluttered up with compounds you later found you couldn't use for whatever reason.

### **LOUISIANA REPORT**

In 1997 I bought five Louisianas, in their imported pots, from Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers, who had acquired them from an American nursery. I had read that they can be unusually gorgeous, so waited eagerly for flowers from mine, but they were far too keen on foliage, so I had to keep splitting them and giving them away. Having no pond, I kept them in florists' buckets with holes drilled through the bottoms, which sat on bricks inside larger ones and which went stagnant far too easily. I thought that the cause of this might be the well rotted horsemuck that I'd put in with the J1 No.3, but omitting it made no difference, and I am now trying to water only once the water level has dropped below the inhabited bucket. Monitoring the water level can be tricky when the plant inside is imitating a vegetative geyser and the weather's a strong hot wind under sun, but I have hopes that when I split them this autumn, the bottom third of the bucket won't be noisome, which has worked so far.

So, this summer some flowered, I think due to my tactic of feeding them (by happenstance) Growmore and replenishing this as soon as the last lot had more or less disappeared. I had been told that they were voracious, so it was probably due to prior starvation rather than disinclination that they had been flowerless up till now, as this is my second year of constant feeding. My first disappointment was 'Elene Rockwell' (C. Army 1973) and should have been a 'light blue self with an orange line beard'. What it was was a thin wine red overlaid on a dingy straw yellow. There was one stem of four flowers which opened on the 18<sup>th</sup> June from a rhizome of three fans, and it's now in a local pond. The next one was lovely, but even less vigorous, and, was annoyingly devoid of label. This was probably 'Scarlet Lady', but that was one Jennifer couldn't track down in the R&I's, and of course the labeled bucketful didn't flower. Neither did 'Shrimp Louis' (Hager 1978), for which Jennifer has kindly provided a description which I unfortunately have yet to need. It put up a very short stem of three from ten fans, all of which were eaten before they opened. Sometimes I think irises are a form of training for sainthood!

'Voodoo Song' flowered on June 20<sup>th</sup>, and was a richer coloured, better textured version of *I. fulvala*, with much broader flower parts. From two buckets I got one stem of three, two terminal flowers and one in an axil. This stem came from a rhizome of six fans, the other identically fanned rhizome being blind. The second bucketful was a rhizome of six fans, with two others elsewhere, a very poor performance compared to *I. fulvala*, which has 4-5 per stem on rhizomes of two fans upwards, and can have three in the top socket. I wouldn't be at all surprised if it did far better under more suitable cultivation too. Perhaps this cultivar needs more food than the others.

'Dixie Deb', for which I have no details, flowered early in June from the oldest rhizomes, but for some reason precisely when didn't get noted. One bucketful gave three stems, one with a flower apiece in four axils and two in the terminal, the others with three and two respectively. These were elegantly shaped, a creamy yellow with a narrow darker flash on the falls. The most floriferous rhizome had four fans, the others four and five respectively, and two fans were off doing their own thing; a rather better performance than that of 'Voodoo Song'. The second bucketful had a similarly six-flowered stem, and one of five. Both these rhizomes had four fans. The third stem had been eaten off low down, and possibly had two fans, although congestion defeated me here, and there were five loners. The biggest bucketful went off to a local pond on 20<sup>th</sup> June, and the apparently-last buds were fully extended from their sheaths at this point but then there was a local hot dry spell and everything went over in a time-lapsed fashion. The first of the last round of four flowers opened on the 25<sup>th</sup>, two per stem in the axils, with one appearing in the terminal of another stem the next day, which took two days to open. Only one flower was still alright by the 30<sup>th</sup> and was over by the 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

So, there you are, Louisiana cultivars will flower under conditions that would kill many other water-lovers, provided they are fed enough, so anyone who has a sheltered spot where they'd like to try them is most welcome to whatever of the above-mentioned they fancy, by post or collection. Proceeds to the G.B.I. Contact me on 01530 272016. Sue Pierce

## **PACIFIC COAST IRISES -**

I down-loaded this article from the S.P.C.N.I. website and I gratefully acknowledge its source and the help and permission to print so freely given by the officers of the Society, to whom I extend best wishes. Ed.

## **PACIFIC COAST NATIVE IRIS (PCNIs or PCIs) - WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?**

**Family: Iridaceae (irises and their relatives).**

**Genus: Iris (true irises)**

**Subgenus: Limniris (the Beardless irises; 13 series)**  
**Coast Native Iris)**

**Series: Californicae (the Pacific**

Beautiful wild irises form part of the exceptionally rich spring and summer flora in Washington, Oregon and California. Where could they have come from? And how did they get there?

Asia and Europe host almost all of the nearly 300 recognized wild iris species. Only a couple dozen, all members of the "beardless iris" group, somehow reached and still flourish in North America.



Botanists classify the wild beardless irises into several "series". Those growing along the Pacific Coast are members of the **series Californicae**. Their nearest relatives are probably among the Siberian irises (**series Sibericae**) ranging today between Japan, China and France. The Pacific Coast Native irises and most Siberian irises share the same count of 40 chromosomes.

Ancestors of today's Pacific Coast irises, like those of the other seven native American iris groups, probably reached the New World across the Bering Strait at various times during the Ice Ages when lowered sea levels left a broad land bridge between the two continents. Under favorable conditions, they extended their ranges eastward to the Atlantic shores and south at least into northern Mexico.

Glaciers periodically blanketed much of the northern hemisphere, making huge areas uninhabitable.

Surviving iris populations must have spent thousands of years isolated in favorable places.

When the frigid barriers retreated during the interglacials, some of the plants came once again into contact. But over time they had adapted and changed, and many retained their new distinctive appearance and choice of habitat. This story was repeated over and over again during successive Glacial / Interglacial cycles.

### **Pacific Coast Irises.** Report from America. Philip Jones.

In last year's spring edition of the *Almanac: Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris* there is an important interview with Joe Ghio. Joe has introduced over 200 registered cultivars. He began in the 1960's. Since those days the colour range and intensity, flower size, substance and ruffling have been greatly improved. Also we have multibranches and upright heavy "tetraploid" foliage. The hybridisation process Joe has developed is very meticulous. On average he makes about one hundred crosses a year that actually take. It goes without saying that far more crosses are made than actually take. Each seedling from each cross is also listed. First year selections are planted out with a maximum of six rhizomes and are left in for two years. Final evaluations and introduction selections are made from these two-year plantings.

At present Joe is concentrating on "neon" signals and edges (eyes and edges), different plicatas, pinks, reds, and tricolours - three distinctive colours in one bloom. Compared with earlier times he does little work now on blue, white or purple. He says that the most difficult colours to obtain have been pink and orange. Joe says that he followed what breaks came along, whether in form, colour, or patterns. The quality he is looking for in his selection process is distinctiveness, then growth and form advancement. He has no particular ideal height. After all the wild PCI species grow in a wide range of heights. His only criterion is that they bloom above the foliage. Joe says he does not plan his specific crosses a long time in advance. His choice of crosses is based upon experience, knowledge of lines and what they produce, and based on what can be seen occurring based on the former. In fact nothing is random. It is planned "as my eye and mind see it."

The early PCI seed was *douglasiana* x *innominata*. Since then he has introduced *munzii* from Coffee Creek. Other complex material of *douglasian*, *femaldii* and *macrosiphon* was also introduced. Another introduction was stock of *douglasiana*, *munzii* and *tenax-chrysophylla*.

His advice to beginners is to study what others have and are doing and to use the best material you have. Don't expect world beaters right away, it takes time. It is important to learn pedigrees. Hybridizing is genetics. To be consistently successful you have to know your material. You have to know its background and how it behaves in breeding.

Joe plants the seed directly into the open ground. He does not treat the seed in any way. He transplants the seedlings in spring before it gets too hot. He says nearly 100% bloom occurs the following year.

Interest in PCIs varies from time to time. It goes in waves but overseas sales to Japan and Britain have remained constant. Joe's latest and greatest PCIs are available from Bay View Gardens.

In the Spring 2000 edition of the *Almanac* there is also an informative article by Arthur Jervis of Staffordshire on the history of the Pacific Coast Iris in the United Kingdom. This contains some reflections on the present situation. Particular attention was paid to the hardiness of Pacific Coast Irises in the United Kingdom. Not everyone has this problem. Perhaps I myself have been lucky in this regard. My original packet of seeds from Orpington in the mid-seventies produced high germination and the plants eventually ended up at the foot of a yew hedge in Hampshire. They survived for years. There are still some there today even after we have tried to pull them all out. The early seed was probably mainly *innominata* x *douglasiana*.

In his article Arthur Jervis mentions a friend who had grown plants from seed from Joe Ghio. A number of the plants that germinated were not hardy. Perhaps the introduction of some of the other species

mentioned by Joe Ghio may not suit our climate. Perhaps we need to begin with the plants we have that survive well. Few of us are likely to have the time or space to engage in the kind of great breeding programme taken on by Joe Ghio. However, there is another possible though more modest route. In last Autumn's newsletter Derek Carver suggested the possibility of promoting local - non-competitive - flower shows. This seems particularly applicable to people who grow PCIs. Considered simply as a hardy perennial PCIs are unlike other plants. Few nurseries sell PCIs and so most of us probably grow them from seed. In ordinary gardening terms this is unusual. There is hardly any other hardy perennial that would normally be grown from seed and produce such a variety of flowers with such great differences of form and size. People who grow these irises end up making their own selections. It is a private choice. But it does not have to be entirely private if we encourage festivals of flowers. Common views concerning the hardiness and excellence of particular plants will start to emerge. Added to this is the fact that seed is often plentiful and germination is usually high and the plants themselves can easily be divided in late September and October. It is also surprising how soon new seedlings flower compared with other plants. I like to divide and replant every few years. This becomes an occasion to introduce others gardeners to PCIs. Many of the plants I have make prolific growth. Last October I needed more space in our small garden. After having thinned out the irises I was able to put together thirteen bundles each one containing sixty plants. I found new homes for each bundle. I had taken photographs of the flowers in the summer and enough people were suitably impressed to want to grow them.

**(Editorial apology – The following lines of text were accidentally omitted from Philip's article in some copies of Newsletter No. 44 – May 2000. At the top of page 11 add "includes browns, peach, brilliant orange which is sometimes blended with blues and violets; Borders on standards and falls from hairline edging to broad bands; and Style arms of sharply contrasting colours and varied shapes."**

**REBLOOM IN P.C.I's** – It is reported by Steve Taniguchi of Santa Clara, CA in the Fall 2000 Edition of the Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris of which he is Editor, that two cultivars registered by Joe Ghio, 'Pescadero' (R. 1980) and 'Rare Reward' (R. 1988) exhibited extremely long bloom seasons. This is thought to be due to repeat bloom trait, and is worth noting for future hybridising. - Editor

## **SIBERIANS at Cleeton in 2000**

**Jennifer Hewitt**

The year here did not go too well; although the early months were generally fairly mild and not too wet, there were some very chilly spells in late March/early April, and so much rain that some of the sibirica beds became waterlogged, covered in thick liverwort or a black slime mould, and plants had to be rescued and moved to (relatively) drier places. This, though, solved the problem of where to plant a number of moisture-lovers, including a number of Tony Huber's versatas and others which have been sent to this country with a view to being entered in a trial for such irises at the RHS Wisley Gardens – if or when such a trial comes to pass.

The flowering season was nevertheless quite successful though as usual some varieties took a year off, not always for the first time! I am sure that our cool conditions account for newly arrived irises being slow to get going, though not all do so. Two rather cool summers, and 2000 was a third, doesn't help. At least there were some dry days suitable for making crosses though only about one-third eventually gave seeds. Among irises flowering for the first time here were several which made a particular impact. 'Noel Aidan' (Foster '93), named after Harry's death for his son, is a tetraploid and a better shape than some of his earlier ones. A self rich blue-violet with small white signal and white-edged falls, it has been slow to start but now I look forward to seeing more of this good flower. It can also be seen in the sibirica trial at Wisley. 'Dawn Waltz' (Schafer/Sacks '98) is more willing, producing 6 stems in only its second summer here. A diploid light lavender-pink of broad ruffled form with creamy style arms, a very pretty iris. Similar in colour but otherwise quite different was Tomas Tamberg's 'Sibtosa Princess' ('98), bred from a converted tetraploid ('Pink Haze x lavender I. setosa) x 'Fourfold Lavender' so it is  $\frac{3}{4}$  sibirica  $\frac{1}{4}$  setosa. This too flowered well and made an effective clump with well-branched stems and multiple blooms. Being tetraploid, it is fertile and set a number of bee pods, though crosses tried with tet Siberians failed.

A third lavender-pink was Anne Mae Miller's diploid Siberian 'Aqua Whispers' ('87) which won the Morgan-Wood Medal in 1995. A pretty flower, I have seen it doing well in the USA but it is not really happy here; I'm sure it would prefer hotter summers as in its home garden, but it does keep trying.



I fell for 'That's My Baby' (Hollingworth '93) when I saw it in Michigan in its registration year and had to have it, but it is another which has taken its time to begin flowering here. Worth waiting for, though. It is a deep wine-red diploid, dwarf in height and at 12" (30 cm) did not reach its registered height of 21" (51cm) but to my eyes, being short just added to its charm.

The real star waited until the beginning of July but can be forgiven as it only arrived in late 1999, and was certainly worth waiting for. Duncan Skene kindly sent me Barry Blyth's 'Superact' ('94), a very appropriate name for this glowing reddish violet diploid with gold signals and a lot of character.

Some which have flowered before but are worth mentioning include Currier McEwen's tets 'Harpswell Snow' ('95) and 'Harpswell Snowburst' ('90). The first is particularly vigorous, a white of flaring form. The name of the second refers to the expanded white signals which occupy a fair area of the falls which also have a white edge. Bob Hollingworth's 'Coronation Anthem' ('90) is a dramatic deep blue with large creamy signals which won the Morgan-Wood Medal in 1997 and does very well here. I wish I could say the same for his 'Over in Gloryland' which is the winner this year but lost it soon after it arrived; it is, however, a good iris elsewhere. 'Roaring Jelly' (Schafer/Sacks '92) is one I make no apologies for mentioning again as it is still a great favourite and anyone who does not grow this lavender-grey and raspberry diploid, Medal winner in 1999, is missing a treat.

But finally 2000 was crowned by the award of the BIS Dykes Medal to Cy Bartlett's 1996 tetraploid 'Perfect Vision', another which everyone should grow as soon as it is available. The large, but proportionate to its height, flowers in shades of blue violet with pale turquoise and blue style arms which light up the centre have great personality. They are ruffled enough for liveliness but not so much as to hide its overall good form, and it grows and flowers generously, with good blue-toned foliage. It really is a good garden iris and one which will set a standard for years to come, though I hope judges will not overlook diploids of equal quality in their own way. A truly uplifting note on which to end.

**SPURIAS** – Members will be saddened to learn that any immediate further involvement of our past-chairman Adrian Whittaker in the activities of the Group is quite out of the question. Family responsibilities preclude it and there is some doubt about Adrian's spurias surviving the winter after their holding area at his daughter's temporary address in Somerset was flooded. Adrian has asked me to pass on his regards to everyone.

Consequently I have "surfed the net" once more and find that there is a very helpful "question and answer" section in the Spuria Iris Society's attractive website. Adrian sent me several of his spurias so I became a member of the Society and could act as a post office for any queries you may have. This could be a temporary measure until a Spuria specialist can be recruited.

In the Society's Winter 2000 Newsletter Jim Hedgecock 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President puts forward ideas for change that merit close attention. It is reported that several of the spuria hybridisers are beginning to have very good success in breeding miniature varieties. It now appears necessary to differentiate between the two height classes when registering new cultivars and to specify whether foliage is evergreen, which has far more appeal compared with summer dormant varieties. I am indebted to Jim Hedgecock and the Society for bringing these matters into the public domain. The registration changes suggested would probably make spurias more popular in their use in garden and landscape planning. I will follow this up. Ed.

## **REPORTS FROM OVERSEAS –**

**A.I.S. Award to Anne and Thomas Blanco White** – I am very pleased to pass on the news from Clarence Mahan that the American Iris Society board voted in November last to recognise the accomplishments of Anne and Thomas Blanco White with the Warburton Medal. This is the medal established two years ago to recognize international accomplishments in the advancement of irises and iris knowledge (U.S. version of the Foster Plaque). The first award was earlier in 2000 to Dr. Rodionenko and the second will be at the A.I.S. Convention this year – to Anne for numerous achievements including her work on "A Guide to Species Irises"; and to Thomas for his translation of Dr. Rodionenko's book. Thank you Clarence for this news and congratulations to Anne and Thomas for this extremely well deserved recognition.

**Dr. Currier McEwen** – In a recent letter to me Currier congratulates Berney Baughen and the B.I.S. on the publication of the series of Introductory Leaflets mentioned earlier in this newsletter. Currier will be interested to learn of any progress made with the development of Pseudatas reported in the last newsletter. Currier and Sharon Hayes Whitney have also worked in that direction but have not yet named any although there are several that are quite "nice and different".

Currier will be 99 years of age on 1<sup>st</sup> April next – we send him our best wishes and hearty congratulations; and note with considerable interest his new "Deep Freeze Project"; hoping to develop ensatas that will survive and grow in St. Petersburg and other far northern places. With a project co-ordinator in place, a science teacher with an avid interest in ensatas, recruitment has taken place of enthusiasts in Alaska, Russia and Scandinavia. They now have seeds of ensatas that are winter hardy in Maine.

**Clarence and Suky Mahan, Northern Virginia** – Members will be pleased to hear that Suky Mahan is making a good recovery from her recent illness which prevented Clarence from attending the New Zealand Iris Convention in November last. We send them our best wishes and thank Clarence for being instrumental in obtaining the following bloom report for us from Mrs. Ginny Spoon as he was out of the picture during the last Japanese iris season because of Suky's illness.

Ginny reports – "The beardless bloom in zone 6 (Northern VA) in our garden was absolutely spectacular this year. We had large amounts of spring and summer rain (over 30 inches during the summer alone). Our joint beardless show with the FSK Iris Society was held on June 17th at the Brookside Gardens Park in Wheaton, MD. We had siberians, species, louisiana, and ensata on exhibit. The best specimen of show was exhibited by Carol Warner and was an ensata 'Light at Dawn'. The best seedling was also an ensata, 'Yado no Sakura' originated by H. Shimizu. The season was about a week to 10 days early due to the mild winter and early spring.

We grow louisiana, siberians, species, ensata, and spurias (about 500 or more named varieties) along with our bearded irises (over 6,000 named varieties) in our garden. We do not sell the beardless irises in our catalog, but our local visitors manage to talk us out of many of them. The bearded irises are planted in raised beds and the others are either in sunken beds with lots of leaf mold added, or planted down around the artificial pond, or in the borders with daylilies just for enjoyment. We have had some of the ensata planted in the same place for over 7 years showing no signs of decline, we just add organic material every winter and let nature take its course. Some of my favorite ensatas are: Japanese Spinning Wheel, Rosewater, Crystal Halo and Star at Midnight (the last two repeat bloom every year for us)."

**Ginny Spoon, President of C&P Iris Society, Winterberry Gardens, Cross Junction, VA zone 6**

**Thank you Ginny, and for your promise to make more notes next spring since you will be growing the beardless guest irises for the 2003 National Convention. - Ed.**

**The Society for Japanese Irises** – It is reported that after years of dedicated service Evelyn White has resigned, for health reasons, as Editor of the Society for Japanese Irises' Review. Evelyn's informative articles over past years have kept us informed of development in the U.S.A. and we send her and her husband John our best wishes.

**Sad news from S.I.G.N.A.** – The death is reported at the end of November of Roy Davidson. The plant world has lost a good friend and SIGNA has lost one of its founders. He will be sadly missed.

**Plant hunting in Siberia** – Anne has sent me the following newsletter item- Nina Alexeeva, who works in the Botanical Institute in St.Petersburg, went on an expedition to the northern end of the Altai mountains this year. As she says, they have at least 22 species of irises there and they found *I. ruthenica* Ker-Gawl., *I. biglumis* Vahl., *i. pallasii* Fish. (syn. *I. lactea*), *I. ludwigii* Maxim., *I. bloudowii* Ledeb., *i. tigridia* Bunge, and *I. potaninii* Maxim.

The whole trip was quite fantastic and she is hoping with Professor R. Kamelin, that another visit to the southern Altai mountains can be organized in 2001. The weather during the growing season should make it fairly easy to organize good trips on comfortable vehicles and it will probably be arranged for



August/September when it should be possible to collect seeds; it isn't really possible to arrange a trip in the flowering season because there is no way of predicting when the snows will have melted. The area is politically and economically stable for visitors and foreign tourists. During field trips the groups will be led and accompanied by experienced botanists from the Institute. The whole affair will be supervised by Prof. Kamelin who is extremely knowledgeable about the endemic flora. There are 2000 species of plants in the Altai of which about half are not found in Europe with 120 endemic species from various genera and families.

Anyone who is interested in taking part in such a trip and would like more information should either contact her on e-mail; Nina Alexeeva on [Nina@NA4075.spb.edu](mailto:Nina@NA4075.spb.edu) or write to her at The Botanical Garden, Popov st.2, St. Petersburg 197376, Russia. If you write, please enclose a suitable number of International Postal coupons to cover postage for her replies.

**(Editorial note- Contributions from overseas members will be warmly welcomed.)**

**PLANTS FOR SALE** - I expect to have plants and seedlings for sale in the autumn; some of my own and some donated by Dr. Currier McEwen from the Wisley Trials. Profits to Group funds. Members expecting to have plants for sale are asked to notify me by the end of May and those wishing to purchase plants should write for a list by early July: s.a.e. please.

**SEED LIST** - The Group is indebted to Sharon Hayes Whitney of Harpswell and Jeff Dunlop of No. Windham, both of Maine, and Tony Huber of Laval, Quebec, for the seeds listed in the Appendix. I have added a few from the rather sparse set this year. Packets cost £2.00 per five, including postage, with a limit of ten initially in order that as many members as possible, particularly new members, may participate. Orders (by refce. no.) and cheques payable to G.B.I. to Mrs. Margaret Criddle, our Seeds Officer a.s.a.p.

Ref.	Description.	Source	Ref.	Description.	Source
001	<i>I. chrysographes</i> (mxd)	P.A.	002	<i>I. chrysographes</i> (coll. by Chmn.)	P.A.
003	<i>I. ensata</i> x (mxd)	P.A.	004	<i>I. ensata</i> x 'Darling'	P.A.
005	<i>I. ensata</i> x 'Galatea Marx'	P.A.	006	<i>I. ensata</i> x 'Hokkaido'	P.A.
007	<i>I. ensata</i> x 'Ol' Man River (Tet.)	P.A.	008	<i>I. ensata</i> x 'Ogi No Mato (ex C. McE)	S.H.W.
009	<i>I. ensata</i> J91/88 - light blue C. McEwen	S.H.W.	010	<i>I. ensata</i> J91/62(88/108x'ChitoseHime'	
011	<i>I. ensata</i> J91/101 (? 'Southern Son, C. McEwen			ex C. McEwen for blue	S.H.W.
	x 'Hekiuk') for blue	S.H.W.	012	<i>I. sibirica</i> K.o.K sdlg. x 'Simple Gifts'	J.B.D.
013	<i>I. sibirica</i> Lt. yellow sdlg. x 'Careless Sally'	J.B.D.	014	<i>I. sibirica</i> Lt. yellow sdlg x	
015	<i>I. sibirica</i> S94/41: McEwen 30" lavender-pink x 'Salamander Crossing'	J.B.D.		'Summer Revels'	J.B.D.
017	<i>I. sibirica</i> x 'Oban' (Tet)	P.A.	016	<i>I. sibirica</i> 'C'less Sally' x 'King of Kings'	J.B.D.
019	<i>I. versicolor</i> '0065' selfed 90cm. purple/pk	T.H.	018	<i>I. spuria</i> x 'Adobe Sunset'	P.A.
021	<i>I. vers.</i> 'Islands Cheer' pur/pink on white	T.H.	020	<i>I. versicolor</i> 'Anticosti Discovery' 110cm	T.H.
023	<i>I. vers.</i> 95-600 slfd. Improved white - early	T.H.	022	<i>I. vers.</i> 'Riopelle' slfd. pink, white veins	T.H.
025	<i>I. vers.</i> .02-02 ('Riopelle' selfed) 90cm -	T.H.	024	<i>I. vers.</i> 96-42 ('Anticosti Discovery' x	
026	<i>I. vers.</i> KR-03-40 (style arms white) x			'Riopelle' - white veins - selfed	T.H.
	KR-03 80cm (red)	T.H.	027	<i>I. vers.</i> Selected 'Riopelle' sdlg - vivid	
028	<i>I. vers.</i> selfed sdlg. 90cm. Large flowers			pink, good branching.	T.H.
	yellow & white signal	T.H.	029	<i>I. virginica</i> var. <i>shrevei</i> selfed, 75cm.	
				pure white, new	T.H.

Inter - Specific Group (all from Tony Huber of Canada)

- 30 *biversata* 'Laurentian Sunset' selfed, 90cm. Purple/violet bordered pink & white, changing to red
- 31 *biversata* 'Tenue Royale' selfed, 70cm. Beetroot purple to burgundy red
- 32 *biversata* 'Quebelle' selfed, 110cm. Violet blue bordered wisteria blue, yellow signal edged white veins
- 33 *versata* selfed, 95cm. Dark blue/violet, self-fertile, variable seedlings, some auto-tets.
- 34 *versicolor* ('Anticosti Discovery') x *laevigata* 90cm. Light purple & white, *versicolor* pattern
- 35 (*versicolor* 'Anticosti Discovery' x *pseudacorus* 'Donau') selfed. 95cm. Larger flowers, *versicolor* pattern, large yellow signal on white, raised mid-rib on leaves.

(Note - Unless requested to the contrary the Group's Seed Officer will include suitable substitutes in cases where the seed requested is no longer available).

STOP PRESS!

2002 BRITISH IRIS SOCIETY 2002  
80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations  
24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2002

To commemorate the 80 years existence of the British Iris Society a convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Bristol, one of England's most historic cities. It was from here that many of the earliest settlers in the U.S.A. came, including the Cabots and the Lodges! It was also the home of Isambard Kingdom Brunel the creator of the famous Avon Suspension bridge. The first iron-clad steamer the S.S. Great Britain is docked in Bristol as is the "Matthew". Culturally Bristol is the main centre in the west of England for opera, ballet, drama, art exhibitions and museums. It has the added advantage of being only 9 miles from the Georgian city of Bath with its Roman Baths and beautiful Abbey Church nestling in the valley of the River Avon.

The convention will include lectures, seminars and group discussions on the iris. There will also be visits to guest iris gardens and other gardens of interest. Two of the guest gardens are also commercial nurseries so it will be possible to purchase irises from the nursery having seen them growing. In the evenings there will be more light-hearted entertainment. At the close of the Convention it is possible to extend your stay to sample the delights of the West Country.

There will be photographic and other competitions together with an iris display. Opportunity to purchase books and memorabilia will also be arranged.

RATES.

The cost of the Convention will be in the order of £80.

Hotel accommodation in the Holiday Inn will be £130. per night to include Dinner, bed and full English Breakfast based on two people sharing a room, i.e. £65 per person. The cost for a single room will be £80.

For further information please contact:

Cy Bartlett  
Old Mill House  
Shurton  
Bridgwater  
Somerset.  
TA5 1QG.

or Suz Winspear (Convention Registrar)  
63 Park Avenue  
Barbourne  
Worcester.  
WR3 7AJ.

(Tel: 01278 733 485)